

POVERTY: Profiles, Diagnoses, Problematics and Prescriptions

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Time past and time future
Are both, perhaps, contained in time present...
Redeem the time.

- T.S. Eliot

To plan is to choose
Choose to go forward.

- Mwalimu J.K. Nyerere

Do unto others
As you would have them do unto you
.....
Inasmuch as ye have done it
Unto the least of these my brethren
Ye have done it unto me.

- The Christ

Rabbit, rabbit, where are you going?
I'm going out to kill the elephant.
Rabbit, Rabbit can you really do that?
Well, I'll try. And try again.

- Great Lakes Proverb

(DRAFT)

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I.

PERSISTENCE AND PERMUTATION: A Moving Setting

Poverty has always been central to African societies, politics and economies and to most African households. This is hardly surprising - until the 19th Century it was the norm throughout the world with exceptions usually ended by natural or war disasters.

Pre colonial African poverty was pervasive, life shortening and complex. So too today but not in precisely the same ways and within rather different structures.

Personal consumption poverty was in many, but not all, areas endemic because of low productivity and very high transport cost plus physical barriers to movement. As a result of the latter drought crises tended to be more disastrous for poor people and often led to state collapse, e.g. the Sahelian empires. Famine was a significant factor in low population growth - as was the slave trade in some areas and war in rather more.

Low access to basic services was endemic and structural but - until late in the colonial period - not prominent in commentary. This is hardly surprising because universal state led access to basic health services, primary education, pure water and - less uniformly - basic transport infrastructure were, at the least, uncommon globally as well as in Africa. Each was provided selectively and unequally to part of the population by mixed state, religious and secular civil society bodies but universal access is a 19th century concept not broadly realised before the 20th.

The one basic service states did seek to provide was security - for households to go about their daily lives unmolested and for trade to flow. As elsewhere quality of delivery in Africa varied greatly and was in a contradictory relationship with state expansion aspirations.

Inequality was high but often in clientelist and affinity structures which lessened antagonism to it unless miserliness, exploitation and corrupt use of office were combined with it. The social contracts did usually require the rich and powerful to provide security, some transfer payments and safety nets for poor households clustered around them and access ladders for some kinsmen.

The modern view of poverty in Africa and of Africans largely emerged in the 1930's and 1940's and became a driving force in policy in the late colonial period. It had a macro/sectoral aspect of overall output, export and state revenue growth and a state led/household oriented basic service plus market support and/or intervention (infrastructure and monopolies) thrust. This pattern persisted at least until the 1970's in most independent states with divergences largely on the emphasis on moving toward universal access to basic services, emergency food security and the respective weights put on public and private enterprise. Differences in accountability and participation were real (and the subjects of dialogue and controversy) but not usually directly linked to poverty reduction/livelihood enhancement policy, albeit higher levels of accountability and of poor or almost poor people's participation did tend to parallel/interact with stress on poverty reduction.

The so called growth and modernisation consensus of the 1950's to 1970's was a two pronged thrust to raise per capita output with enhanced access to basic services, infrastructure and institutions a necessary input. Even more radical governments - e.g. Tanzania - expected the services/infrastructure/institutions to lead both to output growth and - with equal access to markets for poor people, whether via household, cooperative, private sector or state enterprises - also to lead to generalised household personal income, as well as service access, growth.

By the late 1960's - and especially the 1970's - the limitations of this model were becoming clear. In the first place high sustained growth proved hard to achieve. Further the fruits of growth (and the access to services and to markets) did not approach universality so that the poorest half of the population were little affected - a real concern to some (not all) analysts and political leaders as well as - one must assume - poor people.

The attempts - in practice e.g. Tanzania and in quite different ways Botswana and in conceptualisation and analysis e.g. the Redistribution With Growth and Basic Needs 'schools' - to devise an alternative, more poor person friendly growth and development model flourished in the early 1970's but withered in the 1980's (not only in Africa) in the face of a prolonged recession and the Northwestern thrust for market liberalisation and inflation squeezing out at home and away as overriding priorities. It re-emerged partly as critiques to the more neo liberal versions of structural adjustment and, more relevantly perhaps, as contextual responses to the abiding and

deepening realities of African poverty and - especially - collapse of access to basic public services (especially law - order - security for the quarter of Sub Saharan Africans in war wracked economies and polities).

At present the volume of work - usually descriptive or descripto analytical - on poverty of Africans is much higher than before and is rising. It is of uneven quality, still offers little in the way of reliable time series, has severe intra and inter country comparability problems and overemphasises personal (household) consumption relative to other elements. But it now does provide a base for reflective, processual, causal analysis both comparative and contextual.

It can be argued that the data and - especially - the analysis remain imprecise, often inaccurate and open to alternative explanations. While true these objections apply to most applied political economic work - not simply in respect to poverty or in Africa. The appropriate reflection is perhaps that of the first systematic political economist whose work is fairly fully available - Aristotle. He warned that with such topics, data, methods and purposes broad correctness as to realities, relationships and results of actions was both the most that could be achieved and very much better than not exploring, reflecting and acting.

This paper will seek first to explore concepts and methods of poverty definition, mapping and articulation. It then moves toward processual and causal analysis. A brief panorama of African poverty as the millennium ends is followed by a snapshot of Tanzania. In conclusion possible strategic policies and programmes toward sustainable poverty reduction are sketched.

II.

POVERTY: AN EXPLORATION OF CONCEPTS AND ASPECTS

Poverty can be conceptualised as **low levels of welfare** and **presence of deprivation**. That approach is broad enough to cover household personal consumption, access to basic services, socio political participation (or its absence) safety nets (including trampolines to allow earned income recovery after calamities), absence of war and social capital. However, while useful in its holistic approach, it is hard to apply rigorously, especially as several components are hard to

represent quantitatively or – for comparative purposes at least – even ordinally. Sen's lack of entitlements is basically an alternative formulation of this definition.

Poverty is thus a continuum and has relative as well as absolute aspects. Poverty lines normally relate either to absolute poverty or to minimum socially acceptable levels of welfare. In fact, official areas cover only household personal consumption. There is no inherent reason this must be so. A multiple index representation of poverty is perfectly possible and would – assuming avoidance of black-boxing the components into one symbolic number – allow targeting of specific aspects of deprivation affecting different groups. Absolute household personal consumption poverty (defined in terms of nutritional diet plus other necessary items) is moderately non-controversial in main outline albeit practical problems – not least urban, peri urban, town and rural **comparability** within countries and even more the World Bank's desperate attempt to create a \$1 per head per day cutoff line using (highly suspect and non-comparable) Purchasing Power Parity conversions. Relative poverty (and socially just acceptable income lines) pose more problems because both personal and cultural group choices are wider and differ more at higher levels. However, even at absolute poverty line assessment, it is problematic to ignore culturally determined necessary (or at least basic) expenditure – e.g. burial in home area – which are no less priority uses of funds because nutritionists or economic analysts say otherwise.

The conflict between **survey** and **participatory** approaches is intermingled with that on whether the predominance given to household personal expenditure should be reduced by broadening the range of aspects of poverty surveyed and used integrally in policy formulation and implementation (a rerun of the older debate on dethroning GDP per capita as the sole index of development). There is no inherent reason surveys of access to basic services and safety nets cannot be as precise and confirmed as of consumption (indeed they sometimes are) and be given much more weight in the future in formulating policies and programmes. Similarly, while at one extreme surveys can be respectful (uncritical) acceptance of answers to externally identified conceptualisations of poverty and participatory critical challenge to and reshaping of answers in a context moving toward mutually agreed concepts/key questions shared by explorers and poor participants, in practice surveys or participatory appraisals are that monistic. That personal consumption matters a great deal to poor people is not a researcher-imposed myth. Nor is the

need to have some initial framework and some effort at collecting at least ordinally empirical data, perhaps achieving some comparability (at least at one site over time) or avoiding totally reshaping answers by mediator/interrogator 'leadership' absent from the main body of participatory work.

In practice, the key problems are over-emphasis on household personal consumption to the exclusion of other aspects of poverty in surveys, or at least use of survey results, and inadequate attention to quantification and comparability in participatory. When tried, multiple but coordinated approaches appear to promise both maps of and roads to changing reality superior to these attainable through single method approaches.

The basic features of poverty needed for mapping it include:

1. **Household personal consumption.**
2. **Access to and use of basic services** (security, health services, education, water).
3. **Access to markets.**
4. **Endemic poverty safety nets** (for cases of working hands to mouths to feed ratios making earned income inherently inadequate).
5. **Transient calamity or catastrophe trampolines** to keep households together and able to jump back into production when drought or war ends.
6. **Key social indicator performance** (notably life expectancy at birth, infant and under 5 mortality, child and adult malnutrition, literacy) as a test of and complement to the first two aspects (e.g. if universal access to basic health services is parallel to 250 infant and under 5 mortality and 40 years life expectancy at birth, either there are special climatic or occupational problems, a very low quality of health services or totally unreliable data).
7. **Community, social group and political participation** (little or none of which is inherently non- quantifiable at ordinally (e.g. high, moderately high, moderate, moderately low, low, nil).

8. **Specific contextual** (local, zonal, national) aspects (e.g. absence of vermin control against baboons or crocodiles; occupational and environmental risks and human damage from small-scale mining)
9. **Earned and transfer incomes** (the basic entitlement to household personal consumption and access to private or fee charging basic services)
10. **Workload and time allocations** both to identify deprivation from overwork and potential entry points for reducing it (e.g. nearby water access for women and girls especially but not only in rural and peri urban contexts).

Gender (or youth/children) aspects do not fit neatly into this topographical feature list but are important to mapping and acting. Unfortunately, they are rarely prominent among spontaneously raised items in community (as contrasted with women only) participatory processes and are clearly complex:

- (a) Women/girls have roughly equal access to food/health services as men/boys but lower access to education.
- (b) Female headed households, on average are smaller than male (not surprisingly as ex definitio, at least in SSA they lack adult male members). They do not – at least in urban areas – have clearly lower average incomes but may be distributed bipolarly, with a minority well above average income teachers – nurses – substantial ‘informal’ traders and a majority well below average income uneducated, unwaged pole so that a sub category of female headed households remain a priority poverty reduction group.
- (c) Women (and girls) work longer than men (and boys) presumptively because almost all household infrastructure/reproduction work is female (other than construction). For poor women, the result is likely to be work overload and for their daughters poor school access or results and increased probability of remaining poor
- (d) Women’s economic – in the sense of income generating – activity is rising both as a result of economic stress and women’s initiatives (e.g. the female income earning collaboration aspect of the UNICEF catalysed child nutrition programmes in rural

Tanzania has been far more central than expected and has probably been crucial to women's support which has been central to the programmes' very measurable success at reducing moderate child malnutrition and even more radically reducing severe in non-climatic disaster years/areas).

- (e) Household time – income – obligation budgets are rarely unified. The relations/interactions between male and female are usually unequal but by no means unilateral or not involving mutual cross obligations. Their nature(s) and change over time (perhaps in favour of women as their income earning activity rises?) are little explored.
- (f) Both study and policy are tending to become ghettoised – largely carried out by women and marginal or symbolic as to resources devoted. Mainline surveys and poverty reduction strategies largely treat gender aspects as trivial by overlooking or marginalising them. On the other hand, women's socio political participation and women's groups are increasingly influential in some countries (although perhaps especially so among non-poor women who may or may not be closely linked to their poorer sisters).

Child labour – household maintenance, household income generation, domestic hired and 'self employed informal' – has risen. How much and to what levels is variable and disputed as are the consequences (largely, but perhaps not wholly, negative). The focus on isolated (from home household) street children is probably misplaced – other affected groups are much larger and some appear to be severely afflicted.

Comparability and **consolidation** are serious problems. This is not limited to urban/rural domestically albeit uniform valuation of consumption (perhaps at urban retail prices?) and treatment of extra costs of urban life are as yet rarely tackled convincingly. At present, this may not much alter policy and programmes but it does overstate urban/rural gaps. Comparability or elements other than household personal consumption are inherently harder. Basic service access is more quality variable than maize meal e.g. outage rates for rural water appear to vary from 10% to over 50%, the years of teaching needed (including repeats and dropouts) for a complete 5-year primary course varies from under 10 to over 25 (in the latter case with a majority of

completers uncertain in basic arithmetic, barely able to read and far from fluent in the medium of instruction as are up to two-thirds of their teachers).

The first priority is **national comparability** especially aspects which would allow greater understanding of and insights into sustainable reduction of poverty. **International** – however beloved of international bodies and aid agencies – is **much less crucial**. At present – given the massive problems of Comparative Purchasing Power adjustments – it is arguably a bridge too far. In general, where seriously done, notional poverty lines are more convincing than attempts at applying the World Bank's globally comparable one.

Consolidation also poses problems. That it can be done relatively easily for household personal consumption has enhanced the undue emphasis given to that aspect of poverty. Arguably a set of key indices – including all the ten aspects listed above – would be a more useful guide to policy (state or civil society) than one alone, let alone a composite which black boxes its elements and – whatever its headline catching symbolic value – hampers contextual articulation.

Seasonal and **life cycle** poverty have been studied in some countries but outside the main poverty mapping and – especially – policy frame. Whether they deepen poverty and/or have cumulative impact making sustainable reduction harder is unclear, e.g. if hunger (and thus deprivation of strength) is greatest in rural Africa at peak labour requirement (notably harvest) seasons, then it does reduce productivity (covered by annual data) and makes its raising harder (not covered). Because poor households are usually smaller than average (because of fewer children) it is not clear that poverty affects a higher percentage of children than of adults. That however is not an argument against national, OAV and UNICEF child poverty reduction strategies. Nutritional and health deprivation for children (the former at least more prevalent than for adults and usually reducible within manageable cost parameters) have greater lasting impact for children than adults while lack of access to education reduces future productivity/access to livelihoods and probably to socio-political participation. That unambiguously reduces the attainable pace of sustainable poverty reduction.

Old age (and handicapped person) poverty is more ambiguous. Its direct productivity consequences nationally are low and earned income restoration is rarely a plausible target. The basic justification is that how a society treats its weakest members is a test of its basic nature.

The secondary is that the greater the risk of being poor because of injury in old age and from crippling, the greater the imperative to have many children fast to increase the chances of household safety nets.

Moral/spiritual poverty is usually dismissed, or boxed off as an issue for religious groups. This may be true if it is individual and passive. When it is social and aggressive (or leading to resigned passivity) that perception is faulty. The erosion of agreed notions and of mutual respect within society lends directly to higher crime rates and to civil unrest – both of which impose national costs and production losses probably falling disproportionately on poor people. As violent crime, corruption and civil unrest are by no means 1:1 correlated with poverty (e.g. as of 1990 Tanzania was arguably poorer – or at least not much less poor – than Rwanda; on broad personal consumption and access levels South Africa is well above the SSA average) there does appear to be a separate moral (or social norm or social capital) aspect deserving more investigation and – if possible – rehabilitation or renewal support, not just containment and suppression.

Two aspects of poverty stand out as under-emphasised and explored when standing back from the African literature while reviewing it. The first is **income**; the second is **effort** to acquire it.

Entitlements – a much broader term applying to basic services, safety nets and socio political access as well as income for personal consumption – are regularly cited albeit attempts at hard analysis are much less common. But household income – the primary entitlement to personal consumption – is less analysed in poverty terms than is consumption.

For poverty mapping this is readily explicable – implausible consumption/income ratios appear at the top and, more crucial, the bottom of the income spectrum so that consumption figures are usually much closer approximations to reality. For poverty reduction the case may be weaker. For example, household survey income data show that wages, including in practice some ‘informal’ (i.e. unresearched) enterprise wages, are the largest component of urban income (over 60% in Maputo with only the bottom 20% of households markedly lower). Further, they suggest (a suggestion confirmed by direct questioning) that households with formal sector wage earners are the ‘informal’ sector’s dominant market. This casts doubt on the enthusiasts for the

‘informal’ sector as a substitute or replacement for the formal and, more positively, points toward exploration of ways to bolster both through their complementarities.

Poverty mapping – partly because of data collected and partly because of lack of time series – rarely explores changes in total household time input into income generation and – still more – labour contribution to basic services provision. What sketchy commentary exists, is largely commentary on women’s increasing work (over) load or criticism of structural adjustment for forcing poor people to work longer to stay at the same level of personal consumption.

It is clear that for most households **total hours devoted to income generation have grown** and that – at least in urban areas – **more household members are significant income providers** than twenty-five years ago. In urban areas, the added earners are primarily women (which is not self-evidently negative – they had little participation then and their status suffered because of it) and children (unambiguously undesirable). The rural shift may be less gendered and may be heaviest for girls (who work more than boys and apparently to free women’s time from household infrastructural to earning activities). While it is not clear more work by household members to earn is per se a bad thing (it has characterised Europe and, especially, the USA over the same period) more exploration is needed. It would also make clearer why real wage declines (somewhat, or more, misleading because of the rise of non-core wage payments) are a very poor guide to urban household real incomes. That is just as well – otherwise most urban residents in many African countries would have died (or fled to rural home areas) long ago.

III

CAUSAL ELEMENTS AND DYNAMICS OF POVERTY

Mapping poverty is basically a descriptive or descripto-analytical process. It can provide a foundation for causal element identification but is not in itself an analysis of causal relationships and dynamics.

Low production per capita and **uneven income distribution** are at one level two of the four dominant causes of Africa poverty and even the other two – natural calamities (especially

drought) and war are subsumed in large part into output measures. However, these answers necessarily pose the questions ‘Why?’ and ‘What can be done?’ prior to strategy formulation, let alone policy and programme articulation. Fairly clearly massive redistribution by taxation and transfer payments or market price rigging is not a fruitful way forward in SSA. The political resistance, the probable damage to output and the limited gains available in low income countries all point in that direction. However, removing policies and regulations discriminating against the poor and seeking to channel growth in poor person friendly ways (redistribution out of growth) including progress to universal access to security and other basic services and to trampolines/safety nets are more promising. They are also more complex – the reductions in income inequality showing up rather generally in early 1990s surveys (but less so more recently) have reduced the rate of growth of the poverty headcount but are rarely analytically explained. Freeing market forces is a very problematic answer – the usual result of that process is the reverse. Reducing urban/rural inequality by erosion of real urban household incomes paralleled by lesser falls or very modest rises in rural certainly does reduce national gini coefficients, but its meaning in terms of poverty reduction is – to say the least – deeply ambiguous. It can hardly be a sustainable process.

A partially overlapping semi disaggregated checklist is possible:

1. **Low and stagnant productivity** by identifiable operational categories of poor people – e.g. uneducated urban female heads of household, small farming families specialising in domestic staple foods as ‘cash’ as well as ‘subsistence’ crops; rural households more than 10 kilometres from an all year road – is both a cause and an entry point to policy articulation – e.g. simple vocational/artisanal education, staple food crop research and extension on small farming household lines plus encouragement (via knowledge, credit, market access) of crop diversification, building more rural roads and maintaining them less badly. A more general set of causes are poor health, poor nutrition and little (basic or vocational) education. The weak, sick and ill fed – whether in the formal, the informal or the self employed sectors – are highly unlikely to be able to work long, hard and effectively.
2. **Access to basic services** (health care, education, water production extension services, calamity trampolines and security) – or rather lack thereof – are major causes of poverty.

Law and order is never enough – as argued cogently in criticising colonial states – but without it there will not be much else as brutally demonstrated in the 1980's and 1990's. Recent surveys of poor people's concerns and more participatory input collection processes highlight both water and security which have to date not generally featured prominently on basic services lists. They also flag dissatisfaction with the quality of education – and/or a realisation that at primary and lower secondary level it is (whatever it may once have been) a passport to a job or other upmarket livelihood - by rating it surprisingly low on major gaps and priorities for more supply lists.

3. **Inadequate access to capital** notably land use rights, inputs (in kind or via credit to purchase), knowledge (overlapping extension and education), social capital (community enabling or supporting), market infrastructure (notably roads) is a major barrier (in varying ways) for artisans, small business persons and small farming families. In part this reflects general scarcity, in part ill designed institutions (public and private), in part discrimination (e.g. for the rich, against women). Without institutional reform and discrimination reduction, throwing money at this cause will not do much good – especially as little of it will ever reach or benefit poor households.
4. **General or widely impacting calamities** (natural disasters) beyond household and family or community safety net capacity to ride out or adjust to. The impact of drought need not be death or permanent loss of livelihood. But in the absence of trampolines to preserve future livelihood capacity (including prepared land, seed, tools, core livestock herds) deaths and broader permanent income degradation into poverty will result. Similarly terms of trade shifts which are major and/or unlikely to be reversed in the absence of capacity (not least knowledge of alternatives) can have a massive lasting impoverishment impact.
5. **Calamities specific to households** – especially illness, disablement or death of a key earner – are a significant cause. In the case of illness better health access and better family and community safety nets (social capital) are ways forward. In the other cases it is harder to identify truly viable, poverty alleviating or reversing instruments.
6. **War** is probably the largest single cause of poverty in SSA. However, it is a very non uniform one. Where the war is civil and on home soil it is dominant with reversal depending

heavily on government and national rehabilitation – reconstruction – rehabilitation strategy and praxis. Where the war is abroad the burden of keeping it there (deterrence and or mutual defence deployment) can be substantial affecting poverty by forced reallocation of public resources.

7. **Population** (more specifically population growth and gross birth rates) can be a significant aggravating factor. However, the direction of causality is mixed. High child mortality, lack of old age and calamity security except from children, major epidemics (notably malaria and HIV/AIDS) cause high birth rates. High population growth feeds back by raising the costs of moving to universal basic service access, reducing the proportion of working age population (and forcing increased dependence on child labour) and increasing pressure in natural resource and capital supplies. Arguably therefore, population is not a promising direct entry point whereas reducing child mortality, improving health service access and targeting main killer diseases, increasing access to education and broadening safety nets are. This is not to argue against family planning education and facilities to meet demand, but rather to suggest they may be secondary and to require an enabling context of progress on other poverty reduction fronts to be effective.
8. **Inadequate public revenue absolutely and relative to output** is a major cause of poverty in at least a majority of SSA countries. Since the end of the 1970s public consumption per capita has fallen 50% (whereas private consumption per capita has fallen and recovered to near 1980 levels in a majority of countries). Further there is reason to believe quality has fallen. Apart from the general burden there is clear reason to suppose it falls disproportionately on poor people. Service provision decays from the peripheries both geographically and socio-politically e.g. health services abandon the countryside and become attenuated in peri urban areas long before they are cut to unsustainable levels in central urban hospitals. The only answer is more resources mobilised and their pro poor allocation. That includes paying a living household income to public servants as a medium term goal and rapid increase to at least 50% thereof (assuming the possibility and reality of diversified household income streams). At their low point teachers, nurses, constables received about 20% in Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda. Even now after major efforts they remain below 50%. The main point is not that these public servants are a poverty group (true and

relevant as that is) but that, without less bad pay, productivity, morality and morale will decline and privatised, variable 'user fees' will proliferate – both highly disadvantageous to poor people.

9. **Anti poor** policies are a cause – what policies by urban (state, enterprise, civil society) vary. Not all are self evidently anti poor. E.g. in Mozambique until recently registered (not incorporated) enterprise taxes were 50% even in cases in which the comparable individual tax rate would have been 20% or less. This encouraged small enterprises to seek invisibility, not taking up programmes of potential benefit to them and not expanding (and thus hiring more workers whose households would then have moved out of poverty). A civil society example is the deformation of some historic inheritance systems to strip widows and children of assets (hurling them into poverty) without providing the access to housing, food and protection that were traditionally the counterpart of such backward or sideways inheritance.

Put in the way it is here this analysis may appear to be common sense and to provide a firm foundation for direct erection of sustainable poverty reduction policies and programmes. That is, unfortunately, not the case.

First, the interactions among and weights of, causal elements vary within as well as between countries and over time. Identification in detail is harder than broad outline. Further until the causes of relatively good performance are identified policy and programme shifts (which normally require reallocations as well as addition) run the risk of doing unintended damage.

Second, devising and – especially – articulating strategy and a package of policies and programmes which can have significant poverty reduction results and can be financed is both complex and difficult (especially perhaps on the resource mobilisation side). While there are few viable alternatives to its being state led (certainly not donor or external NGO designed and led) it must have broader civil society and household understanding, support and participation to be fully effective.

Third, implementation takes time and regular monitoring – evaluation – adjustment. Initial efforts will reveal unforeseen problems – and opportunities – even if contexts do not change which they usually do. It is 90% perspiration by large numbers of poor people, 9% service

provision by relatively (or even absolutely) poor public servants and civil society leaders and 1% analysis, strategy inspiration.

However, the absence of the 1% will, at best, greatly reduce the productivity of the 99%. Inadequate holistic causal analysis (which is endemic) can be expected to lead to unsound, ill balanced and/or unsustainable strategies and to distort policy and project selection.

IV.

AFRICA END OF MILLENNIUM PANORAMA

Poverty in Sub Saharan Africa is high and, at least in absolute numbers (headcount), rising. This is true whether household personal consumption is used alone or a broader array of tests. Levels and rates, indeed directions of change, vary widely as does quality of data. That summary is indeed approximate but the high levels and the absence of general sustainable falls in poverty incidence both confirm less empirical and analytical observations and fully justify giving policy and resource allocation priority to poverty reduction.

At an econometric level the rate of rise (fall) of output per capita is correlated with falling (rising) headcount and proportional poverty on the household personal consumption test and probably with less deterioration/more quantitative growth with some quality control retained in respect of basic services. However, the output growth elasticity for poverty (negative when poverty is falling) is relatively low and in most cases is swamped by apparent income (really consumption) redistribution. This is a surprising result (and would probably not hold were basic service access and absence of war included in criteria surveyed). Analytical reasons for inequality decline are patchy and problematic.

The negative side turns on the 50% per capita fall in real basic service delivery (which shows few signs of sustainable, widespread reversal) and on the now emerging negative movements in social indicators likely to reflect that fall with a lag. Life expectancy at birth is stagnant or falling in an increasing number of countries over the last five years while there are indication the slowing of reduction in infant and under5 mortality may also go into reverse. (These indicators

are affected by but cannot be explained solely by the HIV epidemic and the other massive killer disease is static in incidence (a failure in the sense control programmes should yield falls). The non lagged physical indicators such as % of age group enrolled in primary school and of rural and urban access to pure water have been stagnant or declining in a majority of SSA countries for rather longer and the negative headline numbers severe deteriorations in quality and (especially in water) serviceability of nominally existing capacity.

Beyond these generalisations there are an increasing number of country or zone or village studies which give insights but do not necessarily point to generalisations in either time or space.

What can be said to be known applicably to many, and requiring checking in all countries?

1. Headcounts (numbers in poverty) are rising from the 1990 **World Development Report** estimate of slightly over 200 million to slightly under 325 million - hardly surprising with stagnant or falling real output per capita in constant domestic price terms combined with radically falling per capita external assistance and negative terms of external trade shifts; but
2. whether they still rising as a proportion of population (if **WDR** and later estimates are taken at face value the shift is from about 31% at the end of the 1980's to 40% in the mid 1990's) on which country results appear to be more diverse is less clear;
3. Growth in per capita output and poverty proportion decline are correlated significantly but this accounts for little of the gain (or loss if, as is frequent, output is growing less rapidly than population); making
4. redistribution the most significant factor in reducing absolute poverty headcount growth and - probably - reducing depth of poverty in countries as diverse as Zambia and Mauritania;
5. its causation and thus ways of supporting, enhancing and/or sustaining it are unclear; while
6. the locus of poverty has shifted from 1-2% urban (98-99% rural) in the early 1960's to 10% odd in the early 1980's to probably on average 25% today. On the one hand the urban proportion of population has risen from about 10% to over 33% and in addition urban wage/Consumer Price Index terms of trade have fared even worse than effective crop price/CPI terms;

7. these general characteristics are not inaccurate but virtually all are based entirely on household personal consumption;
8. adding Basic Service Access and War risk to poverty indicators used in generalising would significantly improve the urban position relative to rural areas which have suffered more severely from reduced access to basic services and from war damage to security; so that
9. the quite limited (except in very bad years) reduction in urban growth rates (usually twice national) is not evidence of some irrational 'bright lights of the city' disposition. Taking more measures into account, urban life, even for most poor urban households, remains less deprived than their available rural alternatives. Further the phenomenon of initially temporary urban migration to seek to break out of the safer but effectively income capped small farming household sector into riskier upmarket urban livelihoods with the intent to return if no breakthrough is achieved in 2 or 3 years remains even if to a lesser extent than in the 1960's or 1970's.

The **increased use of broad open ended at least quasi participatory consultations or forums** together with/complementary to Household Survey has thrown up a number of insights as to perceptions and priorities:

- a. **government**, usually, is still viewed as being a potential part of the answer and expected to play that role even though civil society bodies (especially religious bodies, women's organisations, sometimes trade or peasant unions) are now more numerous and more active in respect to at least some poverty issues;
- b. the **highest priorities** are **security** (against violent interference with ordinary life and livelihood by anybody - whether war, bandits, own army, police, officials, rich neighbours' thugs), **curative** medicine and **water** (a highly gendered issue as it is women and girls' work load and/or cash budgets it would benefit). Except for health these have not featured prominently on most standard lists drawn up by analysts and practitioners in the past;
- c. **access to markets** (roads, transport and both buyers and sellers preferably multiple and competitive) and - in some cases - **food security** in bad years are also cited fairly frequently;

d. education is given notably lower priority than might have been expected - especially in rural areas.

Care is needed in interpretation. If a service is provided less inadequately expanding it may be a lower voiced priority precisely for that reason. For example immunisation/vaccination and mother and child clinics are (because of UNICEF; sustained catalytic, mobilising and extension roles in at least a significant number of cases adopted and internalised by African institutions and leaders) often better provided for than general curative services. Alternatively - or complementarily - because they are provided almost entirely to women and children, who are underrepresented and under vocal in most forums/participatory dialogues they may be under-recorded for that reason. Rural lack of high prioritisation to education probably relates in part to low quality, in part to limited perceived direct or indirect contribution to rural livelihoods and welfare and in part to the collapse of the 1960's illusion that UPE would catapult everybody who completed it into the absolute and relative (largely waged and urban) up market positions of the 10% of adults who had it prior to independence. In addition services never provided by the state probably will not be on priority lists - e.g. in 1987 in Somalia (but not in Somaliland) rural respondents did not prioritise government health services because to all intents and purposes they did not exist and had always been exiguous (whereas the late British colonial model in Somaliland had provided more and endured to a degree in - foreign funded - practice and even more in memory).

What can be said of **policies**? In general **negative ones** - e.g. highly cost inefficient, manager benefiting, single channel marketing systems have been abandoned with real impact on export crop grower prices but less on domestic food crops which were either not covered (most secondary foods, fish, poultry and small stock and often cattle) or were massively by-passed - have been **reduced in number and severity**. That is positive - at least to a point. Many - e.g. co-ops, marketing boards - were targeted on very real prior market failures. That many created worse intervention or institutional failures may well be good grounds for abolition, but is likely to leave the original market failure and a need to tackle it in a new way. e.g. local monopoly combined transporters - produce buyers - general merchandise sellers - seasonal credit providers are better than no functioning rural commercial system but are, by quite standard analysis,

virtually certain to distort markets against poor households. They are in their way at best analogous to mini, local Microsofts.

Whether **poverty programmes, policies and strategies are given more priority** than in - say - 1980 by most SSA governments is **unclear**.

At **declamatory level** - yes. But this may be to **improve donor and poor voter image**. This is especially true when national poverty oriented analysts are largely expatriate and programmes picked from donor menus. However, presentation of a poverty strategy or programme in donor friendly language can have at least three meanings:

1. cynical formulation of proposals to maximise short term receipts from donors while counting on fungibility and lack of transparency to provide real desired (by domestic decision takers) payoffs;
2. opportunistic use to meet real - and at least partially poverty focused priorities/gaps not readily fundable otherwise. e.g. in the 1980's Tanzania's First Social Dimensions of Adjustment programme focused on textbooks (and inputs to print them), rural water spares and non pharmaceutical medical supplies even if its terminology was broader to increase chances of World Bank funding;
3. a national strategy and priorities (backed by enhanced domestically led mapping and allocation of senior personnel) may be 'translated into donorese' - and some domestic non-priority, but donor friendly, elements added on the basis that without such translation donors will not transfer more resources and without the transfers the programmes cannot be sustained no matter how well designed or how desired by poor people. Mozambique for nearly a decade from 1987 was a case in point.

Probably more African decision takers and professionals (absolutely and proportionally) are seriously interested in/give priority to reducing poverty. Added information does enlighten, participation and competitive elections do alter priorities. But transparent, coherent strategies articulated to policy and project packages and tested against both financial feasibility and poor person perceived priorities remain very much the exception.

Curiously, much the same could be said of bilateral donors and most international development organisations and NGOs. **Excluding survival support during wars and calamities relatively low proportions of resource are allocated to direct or reasoned indirect** (e.g. rural roads, credit access for rural oriented transporters, buyers and sellers to restore working capital and transport capacity) **poverty reduction programmes**. Nor do these agencies have articulated country specific strategies (nor usually personnel to develop them) as opposed to a list of very general themes and very specific particular projects - e.g. micro credit, a current fashion, which is promoted without contextual testing or seeking to learn from negative as well as positive experiences elsewhere.

That then is the SSA poverty panorama of the last years of the millennium. It is **far from bright** either as to present levels, recent trends or future prospects. On the other hand it is **by no means totally negative**. Post war r-r-r, even when badly underfinanced, has reduced consumption poverty and improved trampoines and household security substantially and rapidly in several cases e.g. Mozambique, Somaliland, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Except in the most war wracked territories things have fallen apart less and less rapidly than might reasonably have been expected (or than Afro pessimists such as Kaplan and at one phase Mazrui predicted). And in several cases - e.g. Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda - resiliency and the ability to mount recoveries (even if limited) has been impressive.

Ref: RHG/lab/an/jmcw/botspovitp.doc